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Q7(c)

NonAlignment 2.0 underscores India's unique aspiration to emerge as a site for an alternative universality. Comment

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Comparative Politics

Comparative Politics: Nature and major approaches; political economy and political sociology perspectives; limitations of the comparative method.

Core demand of the question

- State what **NonAlignment 2.0** (2012) argued
- **Explain 'alternative universality'**: not Western liberal order as the only universal, not Chinese hierarchy
- Show how Indian practice (plural civilisation, strategic autonomy, Global South voice) claims a site for that
- **Comment critically**: aspiration vs capacity

Revision summary

- **NonAlignment 2.0 (2012) restated strategic autonomy for a China-first, post-NAM world**: partner the U.S., do not join it.

Alternative universality means rules others can inhabit without becoming Western or Chinese tributaries.

India's civilisational pluralism, Global South voice, and issue-based coalitions are the claimed site.

The aspiration is coherent; capacity in the neighbourhood and in manufacturing is the constraint.

The risk is exceptionalism dressed as universality.

Introduction

NonAlignment 2.0, the 2012 document associated with **Sunil Khilnani, Shivshankar Menon, Nandan Nilekani, Srinath Raghavan** and others, was an attempt to write strategic autonomy for a world after NAM's bipolar script. The claim that it underscored India's wish to be a **site of alternative universality** is a theoretical reading: India as a place where a different, still-universal language of order can be spoken - not a satellite of Washington's liberal internationalism, not a pupil of Beijing's hierarchy.

Body

What 2.0 said

The text put **China** as the principal strategic challenge, asked for a harder state and a more capable economy, kept the U.S. as a partner not a patron, and treated the neighbourhood as the first circle. It was realism with an Indian accent: borders, capabilities, and a refusal to subcontract foreign policy. It was not a call to revive the NAM secretariat. It was a call to keep

autonomy when alliances were back in fashion.

Alternative universality

Universality in the post-1945 order often meant a North Atlantic story: markets, human rights, and alliances, later sold as global. Alternative universality means India offering principles that others can inhabit without becoming Western - pluralism, sovereignty, development as a right, and a civilisational self that is not Westphalia's orphan. **Ashis Nandy** and **K. M. Panikkar** are older cousins of this thought; **Jaishankar's Voice of Global South** is the official dialect. The UN, WTO salvage, and a reformed WHO are institutions where that claim is tested. So is the refusal to treat Ukraine's morality as the only morality while Gaza and vaccine apartheid sit on the same planet.

This is not 'anything goes'. Alternative universality still needs **rules against conquest, terror and famine**. It rejects the idea that those rules are copyrighted in Washington. It also rejects a Chinese universality of hierarchical peace.

Comment

As **aspiration**, the phrase is fair to **NonAlignment 2.0** and to the 2020s desk. As **achievement**, India is a messy democracy with a China problem, a Pakistan terror problem, and incomplete manufacturing. A site of universality needs public goods: vaccines were a glimpse; neighbourhood delivery is a counter-glimpse. The danger is that 'alternative' becomes an alibi for exceptionalism. The promise is that a civilisational state can still speak a language the Global South recognises. Energetic diplomacy is the performance. Capacity is the review.

Flow diagram

NonAlignment 2.0 -> Strategic autonomy
NonAlignment 2.0 -> Alternative universality
Alternative universality -> Not only Western liberal order
Alternative universality -> Not Chinese hierarchy
Alternative universality -> Global South inhabitable rules

Conclusion

NonAlignment 2.0 kept autonomy and named China. Read generously, it sketched India as a workshop of another universalism - plural, developmental, non-satellite. The sketch is live. The building is not finished.

Facts & figures

NonAlignment 2.0

2012 independent document, not a Cabinet paper, that shaped strategic-elite vocabulary in Delhi.

Principal challenge

The text treated China as the central strategic problem, a shift from NAM's equal-superpower folklore.

Voice of Global South

2020s official practice that performs alternative universality in G20 and UN settings.

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